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National Opportunity and Responsibility

A Sermon delivered in the Church of the Epiphany, Washington, D. C.

By the Rector
THE REV. RANDOLPH H. MCKIM, D.D., LL.D.

THANKSGIVING DAY
NOVEMBER 25, 1915

Copies of this and other Bulletins may be had on application to the American Rights Committee, 45 Cedar Street, New York City

Washington, D. C., November 28, 1915.

Rev. Dr. Randolph H. McKim,
Rector Church of the Epiphany.

Dear Doctor McKim:

So many persons who were fortunate enough to hear your eloquent and inspiring sermon on Thanksgiving Day have expressed a strong desire to see it in print, that the undersigned members of the vestry, and others, are moved to request permission to have it published in pamphlet form.

Faithfully yours,

Geo. Truesdell,
Henry D. Fry,
Mark F. Finley,
A. R. Shands,
C. N. Osgood,
Byron S. Adams,
Nath'l Wilson.

National Opportunity and Responsibility.

" Let us search and try our ways." — Lam. III, 40.

In obedience to a long-honored custom, the people of the United States are invited to assemble in their places of worship today to render thanks and praise to the Almighty Father, the giver of all good, for the fruits of the earth, and all the other blessings of his bountiful providence.

We respond to the invitation with grateful hearts. The earth has yielded her increase with prodigality unexampled, perhaps, since we became a nation. The sun of prosperity has again risen upon our land. Peace reigns throughout our borders, and, as the President has reminded us, " our ample financial resources have enabled us to steady the markets of the world." For these and other blessings it is meet and right that this great nation with its hundred million people should lift its heart and voice in devout thanksgiving to Almighty God.

But our chief executive bids us consider today " our duty to ourselves and to mankind," and " to ponder the many responsibilities thrust upon us by the great war now being waged." In the same document he speaks of our people " realizing the part they have been called upon to play."

My brethren, let us give heed to this exhortation. Let us ask this morning, very solemnly, as we review the history of the last fifteen months, Have we done our duty to ourselves? Have we done our duty to mankind? Have we bravely met the many responsibilities thrust upon us by this tremendous conflict? Have we nobly played the part we have been called upon to play in this time of unparalleled distresses and disasters?

There are undoubtedly some things upon which we, as American citizens, may dwell with real satisfaction.

(1) The hearts of our people have nobly responded to the cry of distress from Belgium and Servia — vast sums of money have been poured out without stint for the relief of those suffering millions.

(2) We may also contemplate with satisfaction the splendid work done by our American Red Cross on the fields of

battle, in the hospitals, and in the devastated homes of the people.

(3) We are justly proud also of the services bravely and impartially rendered by our Ambassadors in London, in Berlin, in Brussels, in Paris, in Constantinople. The names of Whitlock and Herrick and Sharp and Girard and Morgenthau and Page are worthy of all honor. They have shed lustre on the American name.

(4) With even greater satisfaction we contemplate the heroic labors of our medical experts, bravely rendered, often at the cost of life itself, fighting the battle against disease in stricken Servia. For all these things we are proud and thankful.

But "our duty to ourselves and to mankind" demanded much more than this. The responsibilities thrust upon us by the time were too serious, were of too great proportions, to be met by gifts of money, or by brave diplomatic services, or even by the heroic labors of philanthropy. The Thanksgiving proclamation bids us "be thankful that we have been able to assert our rights and the rights of mankind," and it must be acknowledged that in more than one state paper they have been asserted with great dignity and force and in very trenchant English. But our duty called for something more than *the assertion* of the rights of mankind, and our own. Have we performed that duty?

Consider. We allowed the neutrality of Belgium to be violated without a word of protest. We saw the country of the Belgians ruined and devastated, its ancient hospitable soil sown with thousands of tombs; its cities burned; its peaceful citizens shot to death by hundreds and thousands, and still we raised no voice of protest. We were powerless indeed to stay the hand of violence and cruelty when it seized the throat of poor little Belgium. But it *was* in our power to lift up our voice before the civilized world against this brutal and unspeakable crime. This at least we could have done, but this we failed to do, and so failed of our high duty before God and humanity. And when the Belgian commissioners presented the wrongs of their crucified nation in our capitol we turned them away with icy phrases, and bid them present their case to the Hague tribunal!

Passing over many minor matters, I ask did we do our duty to ourselves and to mankind when the Lusitania was barbarously attacked on the high seas, and a thousand human beings, men, women, and little children, sent to their deaths? We did, indeed, protest against this deed of horror and inhumanity in a state paper which has seldom been equaled in diplomatic history. It was a brave and splendid assertion, not only of the rights of American citizens, but of the rights of humanity. When we read it our hearts leaped up in thankfulness.

It was not long, however, before other vessels bearing American citizens were torpedoed, and again American lives were lost. Once more, in ringing tones, our chief magistrate asserted the purpose to hold to " strict accountability " the nation that had thus outraged the dignity of the United States, and destroyed the lives of our citizens. But the outrages did not cease.

Again, under circumstances of peculiar atrocity, a peaceful merchant ship was destroyed and American lives destroyed with it. Then there came a brave, stern demand that these infamous acts should cease, and the purpose was affirmed in words of adamantine force, to hold the guilty nation to account for its crimes.

Again we rejoiced that our chief magistrate had so nobly expressed the mind and purpose of the nation. Again we believed that those brave words would be followed by deeds as brave. But more than seven long months have passed since the Lusitania horror burst upon the world, and still nothing has been done to avenge the deaths of those American citizens, men, women, and children, ruthlessly murdered on the high seas! Nothing has been done to vindicate the insulted majesty of our Republic! Our words have been of adamant — our deeds have not crystallized, — they are still in the fluid state!

But what could we have done, it may be asked. Should we have declared war on Germany? No. But we should have broken off diplomatic relations with a nation that had thus wantonly outraged every principle of humanity, and insulted the majesty of the Republic. This action would have been supported by a vast majority of our people. Our citizenship had been outraged; our national dignity defiantly trampled upon;

and our whole people were aroused to such a pitch of indignation that the government would have been sustained by an overwhelming majority in vigorous and uncompromising action.

But what, it may be asked, would have been accomplished by breaking off diplomatic relations in response to the loud demand of our citizens? I answer, several things of great moment might have been expected to result.

In the first place we should have *consolidated public opinion.* We should have taken a great step to unify our nation. We are a composite people; many races mingle their tides on our shores. It should, therefore, have been one of the supreme tasks of statesmanship to weld these peoples into one, to fuse together these diverse elements.

Again, in doing so we should have banished from our midst those numerous representatives of foreign powers who are hostile to our country, and we should have broken up many nests of conspiracy, where representatives of alien nations have been plotting against the peace and prosperity of our land. We should have driven into their holes thousands of disloyal citizens who have been obeying the behests of foreign powers while still clutching the privileges of American citizenship.

But more important than this, we should have vindicated the honor and majesty of our country. We should have given expression to the real sentiments of nine-tenths of our people. We should have taken our stand by the side of the great Democracies who are fighting our battles today against the encroachments and usurpations of autocratic tyranny. And we should have thrown into the scale the immense weight of our influence, as the mightiest neutral power, on the side of humanity and law and liberty.

But it will be said, such a course might have led to war. I answer, not necessarily so. Not unless Germany saw fit to declare war against us, — which it is not likely she would have done.

But *suppose it might have led to war?* Is a great and powerful nation to submit to insults and outrage rather than run the risk of war? The central European powers have, in fact, been levying war against the United States for seven months past. They have been attacking our industries, they have been inter-

fering with our domestic affairs, they have been fomenting strikes, they have plotted to blow up our public buildings, to burn our factories, to blow up our ships. Read the Declaration of Independence and see how small were England's acts of oppression against the colonies in comparison with what we have endured at the hands of the central Empires. What an indictment Thomas Jefferson could have drawn up, were he with us today, against Germany and Austria! And I ask, should we fail of our duty in a great world crisis when the blood of our citizens cries to Heaven for vengeance because we are *afraid of the consequences? Where is the spirit of '76,* when thirteen feeble colonies did not hesitate to challenge the power of the mighty English empire rather than submit to unjust taxation — a tax on tea?

Men say, " What could America, in its defenseless condition, without an army, and with so small a navy, what could America do against the mighty armaments of Germany and Austria?" I answer, *what could Germany and Austria do against America so long as the British fleet commands the seas?* They could not land a soldier on our shores! The most they could do would be to smuggle a submarine across the Atlantic and attack our commerce.

And now another outrage has been committed. Another ship (The Ancona), has been sunk, and as American citizens were assassinated on the Lusitania, and on the Arabic, and on the Hesperian, American citizens have now again been assassinated with brutal cruelty on board the Ancona.

This new outrage offers a fresh opportunity to our Government, — not to speak, or to write dispatches, — but *to act* in defense of the insulted majesty of the Republic. We trusted our President. We were ready to give him whole-hearted support. We expected that his virile assertion of the rights of American citizens and of the rights of humanity (which so stirred our blood), would have been followed by action, vigorous action; but after watchfully waiting in vain for seven months, we frankly say we are disappointed. Will we be disappointed now?

In my opinion, American citizens should no longer keep si-

lence. We have patiently waited to be led in the path of duty, but we have waited in vain. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." We ask now, not for strong and resolute words, but for strong and resolute action.

Let it not be said that the words I have uttered this morning are not fitting in the Christian pulpit. I hold, on the contrary, that it is the duty of the Christian pulpit to denounce the sordid and selfish ideals that have regard only to trade and comfort and peace. The Christian pulpit should call trumpet-tongued to the people to be true to our American ideals; true to the principles of liberty and justice enshrined in our history; true to the great principles of Democracy embodied in our Constitution. I remember that it was Mattathias, the priest, who fired the hearts of the Jews to resist the tyranny of Antiochus: "My sons, be valiant and show yourselves men," he cried. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury, who headed the barons at Runnymede when they wrung the Magna Charta from the tyrant John. It was the prophet Ezekiel who was charged to watch and warn the people of the approach of the enemy.

The leaders of the Christian Church have often, in great national crises, stood forth to utter the people's voice against tyrant John. It was the prophet Ezekiel who was charged to duty, to give utterance to the sentiments which I believe throb in many hearts in our country today. I make my own, the words recently uttered by one of our ablest legal lights — "I venture to say, in all reverence, that the God of nations will be better pleased on the coming Thanksgiving Day, — which should also be one of penitence and humility — if we do a little more in fact, as well as in words, to safeguard the rights of humanity."

We confront today, my fellow citizens and my fellow Christians, the most serious crisis that has arisen in the United States for half a century. It is a solemn hour in which we live. The honor of our country is at stake. The security of our citizens on the high seas is in constant jeopardy. Our domestic peace is invaded by the agents of foreign nations. Arson and murder are plotted in the very midst of our peaceful communities. Our supine policy of inaction has grieved and humiliated the hearts of our citizens. A disloyal press, doing the bidding of

foreign nations, boldly flaunts itself before our eyes. The fires of patriotism are burning low among thousands of our people. Meanwhile our country has suffered serious loss of prestige. *The name of American citizen no longer commands the respect it once did.* In such a crisis our citizens have a duty to perform. They should frankly express their sentiments, and I believe that the great majority of our citizens, practically all true Americans, are of opinion that our policy should be governed in this great crisis, not by councils of timidity or international opportunism, but by a steadfast regard to the aspirations and ideals handed down to us by our Revolutionary ancestors; by fidelity to the principles of liberty and Democracy enshrined in our Constitution; by a brave determination to vindicate the honor and majesty of the Republic; by a stern resolution, at whatever cost, to repel the open or secret assaults of foreign powers on our domestic peace and harmony; above all, by loyalty to justice, that justice which should dominate all the moral forces; that justice which "as ancient as humanity itself, eternal as the need of man and nations," is the basis of all civilization.

Our President speaks of the principles of "peace and freedom" by which we have always sought to be guided; but I trust we have also always sought to be guided by the principles of *justice and humanity,* and that we should always be prepared to assert these principles, and to suffer for them if need be.

As it is true of the individual, that "no man liveth to himself," so it is true of a nation — no nation can afford to live to itself. It must consider the rights and happiness of other nations. There are crises in the history of a nation when the words of Christ, "he that saveth his life shall lose it" find their national application. Better even the losses and the sufferings of war, terrible as they are, than the loss of honor — the failure to respond to our national ideals, the humiliation of our national name. Listen to the brave words of the leader of the bar of Brussels in an address which led to his being cast into a Prussian prison: *"Why these sacrifices, why this sorrow? Belgium could have avoided these disasters, saved her existence, her treasures, and the lives of her people, but she preferred her honor."*

In conclusion let me guard myself against misunderstanding. God forbid that I should utter a word that could add a feather's weight to the heavy burden that rests on the President's shoulders.

All true Americans should wish to support their chief magistrate and to labor sympathetically with him in his efforts to grapple with the difficult tasks that confront him at this crisis.

But it is for that very reason that we appeal to him to adhere bravely to the principles he has so clearly enunciated in his diplomatic correspondence with Germany. We are confident that a courageous course of action, just in line with his strong and patriotic utterances last spring and summer, would lighten his burden and clear out of his pathway many of the difficulties and dangers that now beset it. It is our friendliness to him — our sincere loyalty — our earnest wish that he should overcome the difficulties that face him, and triumph over the people who are at once his enemies and the enemies of our country, that moves us to urge upon him a different course from that which he is now pursuing — to seize the opportunity that again presents itself to take bold and decisive action in vindication of the honor of our country. Is it too much to ask him to banish from our shores the plotters and conspirators who, wearing the livery of foreign nations, and accepted as representatives of friendly powers, have been using their diplomatic positions as bases whence to wage war against the peace of our country?

The President no doubt desires to know the sentiments of the people, and as many public men hesitate to speak out, and as the officers of the Army and Navy do not enjoy the right of free speech, it may well be that the voice of the pulpit — which has no political or racial bias — will have unique value as an expression of public sentiment. We who minister in the things of God occupy a position of detachment — unaffected by the currents of politics or of commercial interests.

The people, we are confident, are heartily with the President in his patriotic purpose to put the country in a state of preparation against any attack that may be made upon it by a foreign power; and we also believe that the people would be just as heartily with him, if he should justify the stern purpose expressed in his last Note to Germany by appropriate action now.

Are You an American?

Is the sale of a bale of cotton of more importance to you than protection of American lives?

Are you content with cash indemnities as a full equivalent for the lives of American citizens?

Are you willing to have agitators within our borders mock at the sovereignty of the United States?

Are you willing to surrender your country's right to purchase arms in its hour of need by placing now an embargo on the export of munitions?

* * * * * *

On the battlefields of Europe they are fighting out the issue between world-domination by Prussia and the independent existence of the nations of the world—between the subjugation of the people by bureaucratic power and the freedom of the individual. In this struggle all the ideals and rights for which our forefathers fought in 1776 are at stake.

If Prussia wins——!

It is time for the American people to see and understand the dangers lurking in the policy of indifference and aloofness which is urged upon them.

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If you believe that our country should rouse itself to action, and if you desire to contribute to the expenses of a movement to that end, communicate with the

AMERICAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE,
45 Cedar Street, New York City.

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The American Rights Committee

45 CEDAR STREET NEW YORK CITY

What it Advocates

1.—That the United States Government terminate its futile and humiliating negotiations as to submarine outrages and break off all diplomatic relations with Germany and its Allies.

2.—That the United States sternly suppress all attacks on the lives and property of American citizens in aid of foreign belligerents.

3.—That the United States make its Naval and Military establishments commensurate with its obligations to itself and others.

4.—That Congress, in accordance with the American Note to Austria, decline to pass any Act placing an embargo on the export of Munitions of War.

GEORGE HAVEN PUTNAM, *President.*

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